



**Homeland
Security**

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News Release

HOMELAND SECURITY AGENCIES THWART UNUSUAL HUMAN SMUGGLING SCHEME INVOLVING LUXURY SAILING YACHT *50 Migrants, Including Three-Year-Old, Found Jammed In Cabin Built for Eight*

LOS ANGELES — Two men, one from Florida and one from Southern California, face federal criminal charges today after being intercepted by officers from the Department of Homeland Security as they attempted to smuggle 50 Mexican nationals into the United States by way of Los Angeles Harbor on board a 44-foot sailboat.

The interdiction of the rented French-built yacht by the U.S. Coast Guard earlier this week represents the largest incidence of maritime human smuggling uncovered in the Los Angeles area in recent years. The migrants, including a three-year-old boy and a woman in her final month of pregnancy, were crowded into the vessel's small cabin, which was designed to sleep eight people.

Officials with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which is conducting the ongoing investigation, say the incident shows smugglers' growing desperation in the wake of heightened immigration enforcement along our nation's southern border and at key Arizona and Los Angeles transportation hubs. That crackdown is forcing human smugglers to resort to new tactics in an effort to elude detection.

"The fact that these people were transported on a luxury yacht does not diminish the huge risks involved. Human smuggling is a dangerous criminal enterprise that puts the safety of our communities and even our country at risk," said Loraine Brown, Special Agent-in-Charge for ICE investigations in Los Angeles. "ICE is committed to working with our partners in the Department of Homeland Security not only to disrupt this kind of activity, but to identify and dismantle the criminal organizations behind it," she said.



The two men facing charges in connection with the smuggling plot allegedly picked up the migrants in the Mexican port city of Ensenada for the day long trip to Los Angeles. The migrants told ICE agents they paid \$3,000 each in smuggling fees.

U.S. Coast Guard officers interdicted the yacht at around 10 p.m. Monday night near the Angels Gate entrance to Los Angeles Harbor. The intercept was the result of a Coast Guard investigation. The vessel was stopped by a 41-foot utility boat crew from the Coast Guard Station Los Angeles, two 25-foot response boat crews from the Maritime Safety Security Team 91103, and the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Blackfin. The sailboat was then escorted to the Coast Guard's Integrated Support Command boat basin in San Pedro. The vessel was returned to the yacht rental agency late yesterday.

The 50 smuggled migrants (25 men, 22 women, and three juveniles) will remain in ICE custody until authorities determine how many will be needed as material witnesses in the criminal case.

ICE agents say the U.S.-based company that leased the yacht to the two men is cooperating fully in the investigation. ICE agents caution it is not uncommon for smuggling organizations to seek to exploit legitimate businesses to further their illicit enterprise. Authorities urge business owners who observe suspicious activity that may be related to human smuggling and trafficking or terrorism to contact ICE's toll-free tip line at [1-866-DHS-2ICE].

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